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Fabriquer des ressources territoriales pour renouveler l'offre touristique dans les Alpes et les Pyrénées

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### Foreword

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# Foreword

Mari Oiry-Varacca

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## NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translation: Brian Keogh

- 1 The abundant scientific literature that resulted from studies in the thematic area of tourism and development is now being fundamentally renewed by the recent mobilization of the notion of “resource”. This enables us to go beyond the first generation of studies carried out in the 1970-1980 period, which focused on impacts and favoured an approach that sought to evaluate, measuring, for example, the effects of tourism on host societies. Such an approach considered that the economic benefits of tourism, particularly in the case of the developing world, were insufficient in relation to what was being promised by international organisations (Cazes, 1989), and that its consequences were essentially negative at the cultural level, the presence of tourists being a potential source of identity crises and acculturation processes (Turner, Ash, 1975).
- 2 A second generation of research studies emerged during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in a context of strong institutional mobilization around “sustainable tourism”, encouraging researchers to analyse the manner in which the notion of “sustainable development” influences development policies implemented in the field of mountain tourism (Clarimont, Vlès, 2008). They endeavoured to evaluate, from a sustainability perspective, the effects of tourism practices, including those said to be “sustainable”, in mountain areas (Dérizoz, Bachimon, 2009) and to determine sustainability criteria for mountain tourism practices, taking into account the conditions in which tourism can be a lever for sustainable development (Messerli, Ivès, 1999). To do this, these researchers advocated an approach that was no longer sectoral but transversal, attributing more attention to the specific characteristics of local contexts (Godde, Price, Zimmermann, 2002; Moss, Godde, 2002). However, the paradigm of sustainable development has not fundamentally called into question the “impact”

approach to tourism, continuing to draw attention to its potentially destructive effects. The studies on sustainable tourism sometimes use the notion of “resources”, but with the aim of warning against their possible deterioration through tourism practices (Sacareau, 2011).

- 3 This issue, by mobilising the notion of “resource”, seeks to provide a new perspective on the nexus of tourism and development and thus contribute to a renewal of the approaches in terms of “sustainable development”. Its aim is to continue in the same vein as those studies that also present tourism from the point of view of its potential and that place the actors at the heart of the debate. Such research considers that local societies, far from suffering tourism, are the actors of tourism development with the capacity to use it as an instrument in implementing specific strategies. These studies underline the key role of actors in identifying, “inventing” and promoting new tourism resources and in making these resources levers for territorial development. Such reflections are based on a constructivist theoretical position that suggests that what determines a resource, and the way it is exploited as such by a group of individuals, depends on the representations, intentions and capacities of the latter (Raffestin, 1980). Such ideas relate to two fields of study. The first concerns the recent studies in tourism that show that the tourism industry is based on resources that are constructed and not “given”. They consider so-called “natural” resources, such as mountains, as the fruit of the representations and practices of tourists at a given time (MIT, 2002; Sacareau, 2011). From this point of view, mountain resources are no longer seen as a perishable good to be preserved, but as a resource that is continually reinvented and renewed by tourism practices, and thus capable of being sustained over time.
- 4 The second field of study related to the above reflections concerns work conducted in territorial economics. This provides the opportunity to address more specifically the process of constructing the tourism resource. These studies, focussing on the production of the “territorial resource”, endeavour to determine the process that leads from the discovery of latent resources to their exploitation by local actors, in an environment that decides to attribute value to them (Peyrache-Gadeau, Pecqueur, 2004) and act collectively to promote them (Lamara, 2009). They demonstrate that this process brings resources into use that are not generic or transferable, but specific and localized (Gumuchian, Pecqueur, 2007). Some studies see the archetype of a specific resource in heritage (Landel, Senil, 2009; François *et al.*, 2006). They interest us in that they underline the role that tourism can play in the process of constructing territorial resources, for example, when selecting those heritage objects that tourists consider emblematic of a local identity, when identifying a new function for these objects and promoting them, and, finally, when attributing value to several of these heritage objects and making up a basket of touristic goods, (Pecqueur, 2001). From this perspective, tourism appears as an operator in the creation of the heritage resource and thus a potential economic resource – an area’s heritage being capable of supporting new tourism activities and making an area more competitive by singling it out in relation to others. A few rare studies address the cultural dimension of a specific territorial resource (Landel, Pecqueur, 2009). They envisage heritage both as capital, mobilized by actors in the process of choosing objects, and as the result of this process, as it strengthens the identification of actors with a common heritage and territory, as well as reinforcing the image of the territory around an identity that is associated with

it. The most recent research on heritage resources proposes addressing economic and cultural dimensions together, from a comparative perspective<sup>1</sup>.

- 5 These studies invite more detailed investigation into the role of collective identities – taken to mean “the feeling and desire shared by several individuals to belong to the same group” (Debarbieux, 2006, p. 342) – in the territorial construction process, and the role that tourism can play in the activation of a resource that may be considered as relating to identity. Thus, through the attribution of value to heritage objects, tourism projects participate in a process of “heritagization”, consisting in the selection, conservation and promotion of practices and objects inherited from the past that make sense for a particular social group and reflect its identity by giving it a concrete form (Micoud, 2005). Making these practices and objects into tourism resources by giving them new meaning leads to a reconstruction of identities, a concept that is worthy of further study. By choosing such avenues of research, we are continuing in the same vein as the work carried out on heritage and identity constructions in rural areas (Jousseau, David, Delfosse, 2007) and, more generally, on the conditions for territorial innovation in marginal areas (Gloersen *et al.*, 2010; Boujrout *et al.*, 2009; Giraut, 2009).
- 6 We propose to explore the different research paths identified by these studies on tourism resources in two special issues of the Journal. Our reflections are based on a programme of research<sup>2</sup> that analyses the political, social, economic and identity strategies of tourism projects implemented in marginalized mountain regions. The ultimate aim of this research is to determine the role of the actors involved at different administrative levels (local to global), in the creation of territorial development resources, and to study to what extent the mobilization of identities intervenes in this process. The research is based on the idea that actors involved in tourism projects aim to obtain not only economic advantages from these projects but also symbolic benefits, with a view to renewing their collective identities (Lanfant, 1995; Picard, 2001), and political benefits, so as to be able to better promote the latter, namely in the public arena (Debarbieux, 2012).
- 7 In line with this research, to which several of the authors in these volumes have contributed, the call for papers proposed examining how tourism can be a tool for the construction of territorial resources in mountain regions. It also invited contributors to address the question of the nature of resources mobilized in development initiatives that incorporate tourism. Resources could, then, be understood as “social resources”, enabling studies on the types of actor configurations and collective mobilization that tourism gives rise to in a given place. Resources could also be understood as “identity resources”, providing an opportunity to examine how tourism projects mobilize qualities attributed to various identity references, ranging from objects to territories, and also take into consideration values of the imaginary world regarding both the mountains and local cultures.
- 8 The articles in this special dossier are testament to these conceptions of resource. The first issue proposes a closer look at the different theoretical approaches to resources, while the second focuses more on the heritage and identity dimension of the resource, namely through the notion of a “basket of tourism goods”. The variety of cases studied in this dossier, both in the developed and the developing worlds, bear witness to our desire to compare the process of territorial resource construction, through both sectoral and integrated tourism projects in a variety of very different situations. While

the first issue focuses on the Alps and the Pyrenees, the second presents a number of case studies from a variety of contexts (mainly mountain areas of the Sahel and the Maghreb, but also Europe).

- 9 This issue aims to stimulate reflection on the construction of territorial resources in the context of the renewal of the tourism product by mountain resorts (Bourdeau *et al.*, 2007; Bourdeau, 2009). Thus, in the Alpine and Pyrenean massifs, the Fordist models of tourism development – for which the all-purpose resort is perhaps the most emblematic manifestation – are running out of steam. In response, new territorial development policies are aiming at diversifying the tourism product and extending it over four seasons. The articles in this issue adopt approaches that have the particularity of being situated between theory and practice. A certain number of articles come under the research-action heading, which the *Revue de Géographie Alpine / Journal of Alpine Research* can only applaud. Thus, N. Savelli looks at territorial development in Valgaudemar from his perspective as a development agent, while E. Hatt's scientific study provides valuable input for a requalification project undertaken by municipal authorities and the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department for the Pyrenean ski resort of Gourette.
- 10 The different contributions adopt a variety of theoretical approaches to the study of the tourism resource. Most of them consider the construction of the “social resource” through an analysis of the methods of mobilizing and coordinating actors, which they perceive as a necessary condition for construction of the territorial resource and renewal of the tourism product in mountain areas. For this, the authors use different fields of research. N. Savelli considers the “actor” dimension of the resource by using geographic studies conducted on innovation in marginal areas and on the notion of “collective intelligence”. The contribution by V. Vlès, from the political science field, addresses the question of territorial governance and examines the role of inter-municipal cooperation in resolving territorial management problems and facilitating coordination between private and public actors. His study follows on from research conducted on the resort management systems set up within a municipal or inter-municipal framework, and on the difficulties of dialogue between political decision-makers and the professionals of the tourism sector, and between decision-makers and civil society (Gerbaux, Marcepoil, 2004; Marcepoil, François, Perrin-Bensahel, 2010). Many contributors use studies conducted in territorial economics, by enriching them with other types of approach. J.C. Dissart's work is underpinned by the notion of “territorial capacity”, finding inspiration particularly in the work of A. Sen on capabilities. E. Hatt, whose research is an extension of the studies conducted in urban planning and development on the requalification of public spaces, analyses how the specific “micro-territorial resource”, which is potentially made up of public spaces, can be revealed. She shows that focusing attention on the “micro-territorial” scale, in a project to redevelop public spaces, makes it possible to better understand how they are perceived by those who use them, providing valuable input for promoting them, reworking their image, enhancing their quality and identity, and generally making them easier to understand and more attractive. In the other articles, the heritage dimension of the territorial resource is examined by referring to studies conducted in territorial economics on generic and specific resources, particularly in the article by J.C. Dissart, which shows how generic resources such as snow and slope can be enhanced by a better coordination of actors, and how new specific resources, with an identity value, may be mobilized, for example, along thematic routes promoting local

“savoir faire”. E. Hatt analyses how, in a resort requalification project, the representations of tourists are taken into account and how the specific qualities of public spaces are promoted. J.F. Rodriguez, in his study, extends the work carried out by members of the MIT team on the tourism resource with a view to gaining insights into the changing types of heritage resource deemed valuable in tourism – from “Nature” to “hydropower landscapes” – reflecting changing touristic practices and representations of the landscape. Finally, N. Savelli’s work, conducted from a sociological standpoint, examines representations of the mountains from the imagination with a view to demonstrating that the imaginary world of the high mountains, a place of conquest and challenge, can be mobilized to renew the tourism product of alpine regions situated in geographical and economic marginal areas.

- 11 The case studies presented in these contributions come from a variety of spatial configurations and scales: from the resort (Gourette, in the article by E. Hatt) to that of the massif (the Oisans in J.C. Dissart’s article, the Neouvielle and Encantats massifs in the study by J.F. Rodriguez, the Eastern Pyrenees in the contribution by V. Vlès) and the valley (Valgaudemar, in N. Savelli’s article). This diversity lends itself to comparison and enables identification of the different development paths followed by tourist destinations over time. One type corresponds to ski resorts in crisis that are seeking to extend the season in summer and diversify their tourism product. According to J.C. Dissart, E. Hatt and V. Vlès, activation of the social resource through the coordination of actors constitutes a necessary condition for these resorts to make better use of the generic resources (the snow-covered slopes) and to “invent” specific resources based on those objects and practices identified as emblematic of local identity. A second type, which is dealt with in the article by J.F. Rodriguez, corresponds to tourist areas where hiking is a predominant activity, based on the imaginary world of mountains as the archetype of the beautiful natural landscape. This tourism product is diversified by attributing value to industrial heritage resources, giving rise to new tourism practices by integrating hydropower facilities into hiking circuits. Finally, a third type corresponds to those tourist areas that are isolated, such as the Valgaudemar valley in many respects. According to Savelli, mobilizing a generic imaginery world of high mountains may make it possible to diversify tourism based on outdoor leisure activities and to extend the winter tourist season. Does the answer therefore lie in specific resources, based on identity, or generic resources? Depending on the context, both one and the other may be (re)invented to renew the tourism product. The attention focused on the actors is therefore of capital importance.

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## NOTES

1. In this respect, mention may be made of the research studies presented at the International Conference "Ressources patrimoniales et alternatives touristiques: entre oasis et montagne (Heritage resources and touristic alternatives: between oasis and mountain)", organised by the Université d'Ouarzazate and the Edytem laboratory (Université de Savoie), which was held at Ouarzazate (Morocco), 21 and 22 November 2011.
2. This programme, entitled MIST-AA (The challenge of Marginality and collective Identities in Sustainable Tourism development strategies in Atlas and Aïr), financed in Switzerland by the National Research Fund and the Department of Development and Cooperation, enabled researchers at the universities of Geneva, Marrakech and Niamey to work together over a period of three years, from March 2009 to March 2012. It was directed by Bernard Debarbieux and Frédéric Giraut (Geneva), Saïd Boujrouf, Ouidad Tebaa and Fatima Gebrati (Marrakech), and Lawali Dambo, Ouassa Tiekoura and Mansour Moutari (Niamey).

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